



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
31 December 2019

English only

Commission on Population and Development

Fifty-third session

30 March–3 April 2020

Item 3 of the provisional agenda¹

**General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation
of the Programme of Action of the International Conference
on Population and Development at the global, regional and
national levels**

**3 (b): Population, food security, nutrition and
sustainable development**

Statement submitted by Marie Stopes International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council²

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ [E/CN.9/2020/1](#).

² The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Marie Stopes International is one of the world's largest sexual and reproductive health providers providing personalised contraception and safe abortion services to women and girls in 37 countries. In 2018 our services prevented 12.3 million unintended pregnancies and 6.4 million unsafe abortions.

We would like to thank the Commission on Population and Development for this opportunity to discuss the theme of population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development and take this opportunity to highlight the crucial role that women and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) can play in relation to food security and sustainable development.

We would like to refer the Commission to:

- Thriving Together: Environmental Conservation and Family Planning Statement supported by 150 organisations. <https://thrivingtogether.global/the-statement/>
- A call to action to climate change negotiators and planners to bridge the divide between SRHR and climate change conversations. <https://www.mariestopes.org/news/2019/4/global-call-to-action-recognise-the-benefits-of-integrating-srhr-programming-into-climate-action/>

Background

Supporting women and girls to meet their desired fertility intentions can play a significant role in promoting sustainable development and increasing the resilience of both communities and the environments in which they live in a world facing a climate emergency.

Poor and rural communities in developing countries often have extremely limited access to even basic reproductive health services, and there are currently an estimated 214 million women and girls who want to avoid pregnancy but are not able to access modern contraception.

Contributing to the realisation of women and girls' SRHR supports their empowerment, improves individual and family health, and advances education and life opportunities. All of this can decrease their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, reduce population pressures on resources, and support sustainable development through the demographic dividend.

Climate change adaptation, population pressures and food security

From our programmes in fragile environmental settings such as Madagascar and Bangladesh we have seen first-hand the strong linkages between the health of people and the health of the environment. Nature and people are interdependent, and health underpins both so we must therefore meet the needs of human communities and ecosystems in tandem. In an analysis of the first 40 developing country National Adaptation Plans of Action, in which countries mapped priorities for adapting to the challenges that climate change will bring, 37 of them mentioned population pressures as a key factor that made addressing the challenges of climate change more difficult. The five most frequently mentioned challenges were:

- Population pressure on fresh water availability
- Population affecting soil degradation/erosion – implications for agriculture
- Shortage of land per capita/over grazing
- Deforestation

- High population density/migration to coastal areas, thereby increasing vulnerability

At the most basic level, ensuring food security requires securing sufficient food for a given population (Packard et al. 2012). Climate change has caused rising global temperatures and shifting precipitation patterns, which have led to a reduction in agricultural productivity in many countries where high proportions of the population rely on rain-fed agriculture. Food insecurity is a consequence. These challenges therefore exacerbate the pressures of climate change and induce increased food insecurity and nutrition pressures.

In many countries with a high vulnerability to climate change, there is a high unmet need for modern contraception. When a woman or girl has reproductive choice, she is more likely to complete her education and enter the workforce, and less likely to fall into —or remain trapped in— poverty, leading to increased individual resilience and ability to recover from the impacts of climate change. Evidence shows that in communities where access to contraception and safe abortion is guaranteed, women tend to choose smaller families, which can also ease the population pressures affecting food security.

Opportunities for sustainable development through the demographic dividend

A decline in both mortality and fertility rates has meant that in many countries the population size dependent on the working age population has declined. This has opened a window of opportunity for rapid economic growth. However, this opportunity can easily be wasted if investments are not made in the right social, governance and economic policies.

Enabling women and girls to plan and space their births means that families are more able to meet their most pressing needs and invest in their future social capital. Investing in social capital increases productivity, which is a key driver for economic growth. Additionally, smaller families often have more disposable income, which can accelerate sustainable development (Sandars, 2015). Therefore, increasing access to contraception and safe abortion is critical in order to harness this window of opportunity.

Conclusion

The Sustainable Development Goals call for integrated solutions. Our key recommendation is for Governments and development actors to work across sectors to find integrated solutions, partnerships and programmes that support climate action, food security and sustainable development, informed by population dynamics, and with protecting and promoting SRHR at their core.